

SPEC

D) IN THE SPECIFICATION

1. MARKED UP "CROSS-REFERENCE TO OTHER APPLICATION": PAGE 1, LINES 3-5:

Q1
This application is a continuation application of co-pending application serial number 09/602,222, filed June 23, 2000, now U.S. Patent No. 6,594,640, which is based on and claims filing priority of co-pending U.S. provisional patent application serial number 60/140,603, filed on June 23, 1999.

2. MARKED-UP REPLACEMENT PARAGRAPH: PAGE 4, LINE 23 – PAGE 5, LINE 30:

Q2
With regard to Figure 1, a model of the frequent flyer systems of the prior art is presented. Two different airlines servers are shown surrounded by their related marketing partners, the first grouping labeled Airline 1 100 and the second independently operated but functionally similar grouping labeled Airline 2 200. In order to lure more business travelers, the airlines 100, 200 have established marketing agreements with travel related companies to provide the business traveler with a more robust way to generate rewards in the form of frequent flyer miles. These marketing arrangements or associations have typically involved credit card companies, phone companies, hotel chains and car rental companies. Any purchases made through these "co-branded" partners were then awarded to the user periodically. Bonus miles or points may additionally be accumulated based on the user's actions in response to offers made by the airline or in coordination with the partner company. For example, phone companies offer bonus miles to users based on the user's agreement to change phone service. These points are obtained by the partner companies by purchasing them from the issuing entity for redistribution as an incentive to utilize their particular goods and/or services. Figure 2 shows some sample co-branded cards that are representative of marketing agreements between TWA, Sprint, and Mastercard. In order to receive these benefits, the user must sign up with each of the partner companies separately and provide the frequent flyer

AB account number that is to receive the credited miles. A user either making phone calls or purchases in accordance with the agreements made with each of these partners will first accumulate a value on the partner's system which in turn is periodically updated on the airline server to reflect the value earned during that period. Figure 3 is representative of a typical user account that shows various earnings in the system transferred in from any of the co-branded partners. The records of the table in Figure 3 identify the source of the rewards, the dates they were recorded and the number of miles associated with that transaction. The user can view the accumulated miles by accessing the airline server or by tracking the individual value reported to the user through the various bills the user receives from each of the co-branded partners.

3. MARKED-UP REPLACEMENT PARAGRAPH: PAGE 7, LINE 26 – PAGE 9, LINE 5:

AB A system and method are disclosed where the system allows the user to redeem the accumulated reward points from a plurality of reward entities for exchange with a merchant. The user requests process for redemption of the pre-accumulated reward points comprises the steps of the user requesting, via a user computer, a trading server computer to obtain reward points from a reward server associated with a rewarding entity with which the user has reward points. The reward server computer decreases the ~~users reward account~~ user's reward point account by the requested number of reward points. The reward server computer conveys consideration to the trading server computer, where the consideration corresponds to the number of reward points decreased in the account of the reward server. The trading server computer increases the reward exchange account on the trading server associated with the user by the requested number of points. The trading server receives the consideration from the reward server computer. Following or anticipating this conversion into the trading server, the user requests a purchase of an item from an associated merchant computer by selecting the item to be purchased from a plurality of available items. The trading server computer confirms that the user's reward exchange account contains sufficient points to purchase the selected item. The user may purchase additional points in the event that his account does not contain the requisite number of points for making the purchase transaction. The trading

Q3 server computer requests the merchant computer to deliver the item to the user. The trading server decreases the user exchange account by the number of points corresponding to the purchased item and the trading server computer conveys consideration to the merchant computer equivalent to the required points. In another embodiment, the user may redeem rewards at the reward server following the selection of an item to be acquired. Policies may be established to automatically contact each of the reward servers according to a user procurement profile to transact the required payment. This profile may indicate the order of redemption and method of providing funds sufficient to cover the purchase after redeemable points are exhausted. After redemption the consideration is transferred to the respective merchant.

4. MARKED-UP REPLACEMENT PARAGRAPH: PAGE 10, LINES 4-16:

Q4 With reference to Figure 4, a plurality of reward server computers 10, 12, 14, a trading server 20, a merchant computer 30 and a user computer 40 are shown in communication with a network 40 2. The network may comprise any type of communication process where computers may contact each other. The present invention will be described with respect to an Internet-based network where the reward server computer 10 is associated with an airline frequent flyer program. Any type of reward server may also be used in this system. The reward server computer may be a credit card reward program such as offered by American Express where the user earns rewards based on purchases or an advertising based award program where the user earns rewards by selecting advertising content.

5. MARKED-UP REPLACEMENT PARAGRAPH: PAGE 10, LINE 18 – PAGE 11, LINE 6:

Q5 A user of this system may acquire and accumulate rewards through any prior art means such as shown on Figure 1, which are then posted in a user's reward point account 52 that is accessible through the reward server computer 10. The trading server computer 20 is in communication through the network 2 with a user on a user computer

Q5 40 and is additionally able to connect to the reward server computers 10,12,14 through the network 2 in accordance with techniques well known in the art for Internet communications. The merchant computer 30 is representative of any site that can communicate with the network that has goods or services for sale or trade. The merchant may have a direct relationship with the trading server where the direct relationship allows for a streamlined process for allowing a user to acquire products offered via the merchant computer. Alternatively, the merchant computer may be an independent merchant that does not currently have a profile defined in the trading server that will accept payment from another computer system in any one of well known e-commerce embodiments.

6. MARKED-UP REPLACEMENT PARAGRAPH: PAGE 12, LINE 10 – PAGE 13, LINE 24:

Q6 The method of allowing the user to redeem the accumulated reward points from one or more of a plurality of reward entities will now be described with respect to Figure 4 and the data flow diagram of Figure 6. The trading server system would allow users to “log in” to access the functionality provided where the user may interact with applications, forms or controls. For example, the user may view his account information by using a web browser to enter the appropriate identification information and then select buttons, links or other selectable objects to navigate to the part of the system desired. If the user does not yet have an account (step 602), then the user may be enrolled per the flow diagram of Figure 8 (step 604) as discussed below. The user, from the user computer, makes a request to the trading server computer 20 via communications flow 102 (step 600) ~~at step 102~~, requesting redemption through the network 2 for a portion of the pre-accumulated reward points stored for the user in one of the rewarding entities. A ~~user reward account~~ user's reward point account 52 is associated with each of the reward servers but is only shown in Figure 4 connected to the airline server for sake of clarity. Communications are made by the trading server 20 to the user computer 40 via communications data flows 104. The user may interactively select rewards to be redeemed, or the system may determine which rewards are to be redeemed based on a previously defined user profile rule (step 606). The trading server computer 20 “obtains”

Q6 the reward points from a reward server 10, 12, 14 stored in the user's account 52 by contacting the appropriate reward server via communication flow 110 (step 608) at step 110 according to the user's requirements, by using the connection parameters as defined in a database 54 on the trading server as shown in Figure 5. In one embodiment, the trading server retrieves reward point account balance information via communications flow 114 (step 610) at step 114 from the reward server for the user. In another embodiment, the trading server transfers as part of the communication 110, the requested reward mileage to be redeemed (step 612). The reward server computer 10 decreases the ~~users reward account~~ user's reward point account 52 by the requested number of reward points (step 614). The term point is used to reference any earned value that has a cash equivalent or negotiable worth as in "frequent flyer" point or mile. The reward server computer 10 conveys consideration to the trading server computer 20 where the consideration corresponds to the number of reward points decreased in the user's account 52 on the reward server 10 (step 616). For example, the consideration may be in the form of a monetary credit to an account that exists between the trading server and the reward server, that gets paid at the end of a predefined billing cycle (i.e. every month). The trading server computer 20 increases the reward exchange account 54 associated with the user by the received number of points (step 620). The trading server computer 20 in turn, receives the consideration from the reward server computer 10 (step 618).

7. NEW PARAGRAPH AT PAGE 13, LINE 25:

Q7 Similar communications are made between the trading server 20 and the credit card reward server 12, as indicated by the data communications 120 made by the trading server 20 to the credit card reward server 12 and the data communications 124 made by the credit card reward server 12 to the trading server 20. Likewise, communications are made between the trading server 20 and the marketing reward server 14, as indicated by the data communications 130 made by the trading server 20 to the marketing reward server 14 and the data communications 134 made by the marketing reward server 14 to the trading server 20. In each case, the trading server 20 increases the user's reward exchange account 54 by the received number of points from the credit card reward server 12 and the marketing reward server 14, respectively.

8. MARKED-UP REPLACEMENT PARAGRAPH: PAGE 13, LINE 26 – PAGE 14, LINE 19:

As In the second part of the transaction (see Figure 7), the user from a user computer 40 may make a request 150 to purchase an item from an associated merchant computer 30 (step 700). In the preferred embodiment, the merchant computer system will be a networked computer system accessible via the Internet. The user would visit the site by selecting on a link from the trading server's web site or by entering the name or address of the destination site. The user may identify one or many items to be acquired from one or several merchants 30. The user elects to pay for the desired item with points (step 702), and the user is "redirected" from the merchant server to the trading server at step 704. If the user does not have an account (step 706) then the user is enrolled per the flow diagram of Figure 8 (step 708). The trading server computer 20 would confirm that the user has sufficient points to purchase the selected item by communicating with the trading server 20 via communication flows 140, 144 in order to check ~~checking~~ the user's reward exchange account 54 (step 710). If the user does not have enough points in his reward exchange account at the trading server 20, then the process of trading more points from the user's reward point account 52 into his reward exchange account 54 is executed by branching to the flow diagram at exit point A (step 712) which brings the process to the flow diagram in Figure 6 discussed above. After enough points are traded, the user continues with the process from step 712 as shown in Figure 7. The trading server computer 20 would request the merchant computer to deliver the item to the user. The user delivery information may be retrieved from the trading server computer 20 or may be supplied in some other manner. The trading server computer 20 would decrease the user exchange account 54 by the number of points corresponding to the purchased item (step 714). The trading server computer 20 conveys consideration to the merchant computer 30 equivalent to the cost of the item by means well known in the art of electronic commerce (e.g. by a preexisting account, credit card, etc.)(steps 716, 718). In the alternative, the consideration may be a direct transfer of points to an account

ad associated with the merchant. The merchant then completes the transaction at step 720, for example by delivering the purchased item.

9. MARKED-UP REPLACEMENT PARAGRAPH: PAGE 15, LINE 21 – PAGE 16, LINE 2:

A9 Figure 8 describes the process steps involved in enrolling a user to utilize the trader server. The user accesses the trading server 20 at step 800 and selects an option to create a user account at step 802. The data entered by the user may be used in determining whether a user allows unsolicited offers to be presented from the trading server. The user's preferences for manufactured goods services, products, travel destinations, hobbies, interests or any other user entered criteria may be stored in the database for subsequent use by the system (steps 804 and 808). The trading server has the ability to receive offers from reward servers or merchants (steps 806 and 808) which may then be directed to users based on the database profile information provided by the user (see Figure 9). At step 900, the reward server contacts the trading server with an offer to redeem points. Similarly, a merchant may contact the trading server with an offer to be distributed to members (step 902). The trading server records the offer in a database (step 906), and the trading server may record a limited conversion rate in its database (step 906). The reward server may then contact the user with an offer to redeem at step 908. Optionally, the process may branch to the flow diagram in Figure 6 discussed above (step 910).

10. MARKED-UP REPLACEMENT PARAGRAPH: PAGE 16, LINES 4–11:

A10 The trading server may also be contacted in response to a button or hyperlink located on a web page accessible by the user from the airline reward server (Figure 10, steps 1000 and 1002). The process may continue to that described with respect to Figure 6 for trading points into a reward exchange account (step 1004). In a

Q10 similar manner, hyperlinks or calling routines may allow a user to access a reservations system or merchant from the trading server. The link would direct the user to partner or associated air carriers where the points in a user exchange account on the trading server 20 may be used to acquire reduced fare flights.

11. MARKED-UP "ABSTRACT": PAGE 32, LINES 1-20

ABSTRACT

Q11 A system and method for operating a reward points accumulation and redemption program wherein a user earns reward points from a plurality of independent reward points issuing entities, with each of the reward points issuing entities tracking the user's earned reward points in a user reward point account stored on a rewards server (such as a frequent flyer account or a credit card loyalty account). A trading server accumulates some or all of the user's earned reward points from each of the reward servers interconnected over a network in association with consideration provided by the reward servers to the trading server and credits the accumulated points into a single reward exchange account associated with the user. The user may then select an item for purchase from a merchant computer interconnected to the network with the accumulated reward points. The merchant computer provides the item to the user in exchange for consideration received from said trading server, and the trading server reduces the number of points in the user's reward exchange account in accordance with the consideration provided to the merchant computer. The item is provided to the user in exchange for a subset or all of the reward points.
